

Shared Voices: Writing Centers and Social Media

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This article is a brief account of how the Writing Center at Daytona State College has begun to utilize social media in our space. We examine the platforms that we use, along with the data associated with them, and then discuss our goals for integrating our staff into the narrative that we share on campus and virtual campus. We first want to see our staff as both producers and consumers of our social media and help them create an online environment that celebrates positive interactions.

Keywords: Social media, online engagement, tutor training
Follow DSC Writing Center @dscwritingcenter on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest and @dsc_wc on Twitter.

Introduction

Goode and Woodward (2016) suggested since “students are spending more of their time online, universities need to engage more with what is a digital extension of their campuses.” With new platforms growing in popularity and existing ones evolving with new features and users, social media is a mainstay of most students’ daily life. If social media presences can serve as a digital extension of universities, writing and communication centers have to recognize the endless opportunities the virtual campus community offers as well. Writing and communication centers are the safe haven for many students on campus, and it’s important that centers embrace this opportunity to do the same online. Even though our peer tutors are great at assisting their peers with creating content, this does not mean that they see themselves as writers or producers of media. By having peer tutors craft social media posts, we are inviting them to contribute to the shared narrative of our center.

Institutional Profile

Daytona State College’s main campus is located in Daytona Beach, Florida, with six regional campuses across Volusia and Flagler counties. This public college has an enrollment of approximately 26,000 students. Most of our students, 57%, are enrolled as part-time students and 43% are enrolled as full-time students (Daytona State College, 2018). Internal reports indicate that 7 out of 10 DSC students fall at or below the poverty line (Jarmusz, 2017). In a 2015 Community College Survey of Student Engagement report, 16% of those who responded self-report being homeless (as cited in Daytona State College, 2016).

The Writing Center and Use of Social Media at Daytona State College

The Writing Center at Daytona State College is highly integrated into the college. We are a communication center in practice and a writing center in name. As a result of growing partnerships with the different departments that require communication-based projects, we have broadened our mission to embrace all forms of writing and

communication support at the core of our work. Tutors are trained to assist a wide array of projects, and, as we like to say, training is never over, so we are always evolving training to incorporate new media and communication-based assignments.

In addition to undergraduate peer tutors, our Writing Center operates with both full-time and part-time writing specialists. Our peer tutors are recommended to us by faculty and usually work for two semesters on average. This quick turnover has shown us that we not only need to build communities quickly, but also have to have an overarching consistency of messaging. Moreover, we utilize a variety of social media platforms, specifically Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, to connect with our current and former tutors as well as our followers. The analytics gathered from our social media platforms have given us a clearer picture of those who follow us and those we reach. For the most part, the consumers of our media lie in the geographic vicinity of our campuses. We have twice as many women consumers than men. Analytics for our Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest profiles reflect most of our followers are female between the ages of 25-34 (see Figures 1.1-1.4). With the average age of our students being 27, this seems reasonable (Daytona State College, 2018). Even though our followers align with the average student age, on our Facebook account, the highest percentage of the people that we reach and who interact with (“Like”) our content is surprisingly in an older age bracket of 35-44

and 45-55. These numbers have led us to question ourselves about the students we reach and how we can effectively reach more of them. Essentially, how can we attempt to make our social media presence reflect the diversity of our users and our staff? Over and over, our analytics show that our best and more engaging content on social media is when our tutors are tagged in posts and showing our community that this is a place with an enthusiastic, creative, and fun staff.

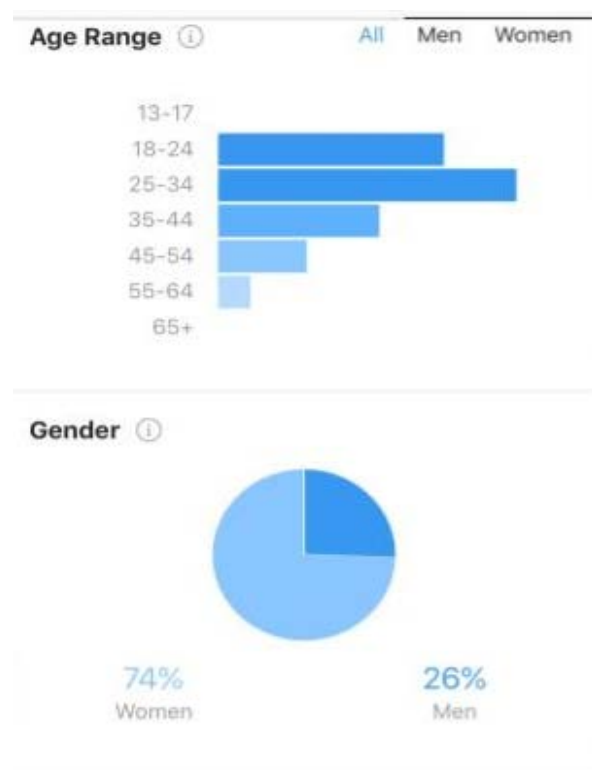


Figure 1.1. *The DSC Writing Center’s Instagram followers are mostly women between 25-34.*

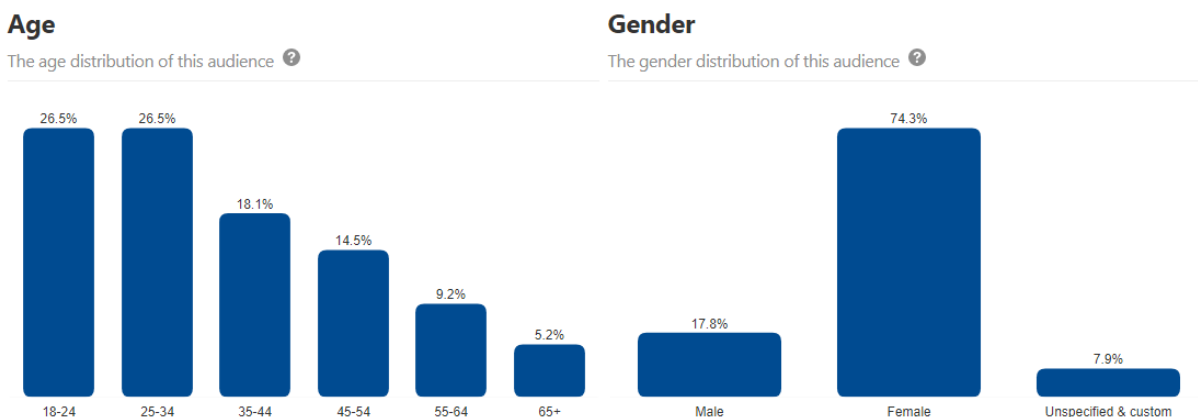


Figure 1.2. The DSC Writing Center's Pinterest account averages 700 monthly viewers, 74% of which are female.



Figure 1.3. In April 2019, our center hosted an event and we posted pictures of our staff, unlike the previous month's more text-heavy content. The impressions suggested followers like to see staff featured.

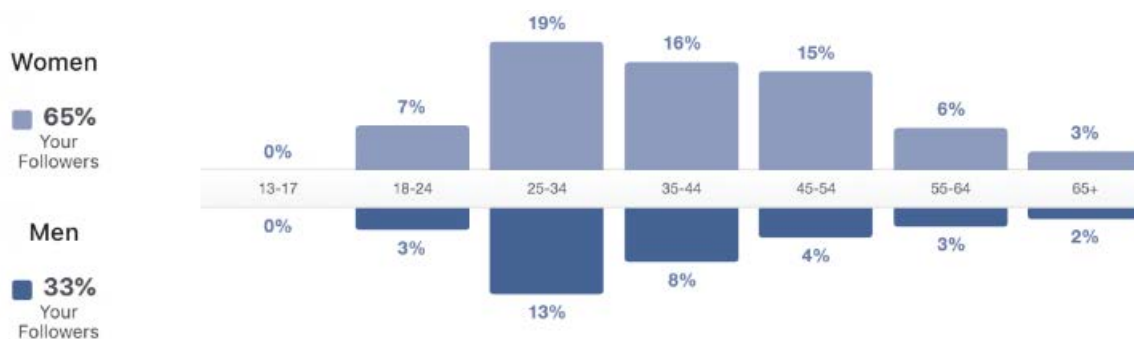


Figure 1.4. The DSC Writing Center's Facebook followers are predominantly female and more evenly represented across three age groups, 25-34; 35-44; and 45-54.

Students and Student Workers as Consumers and Producers of Media

The prevalence and, some would argue, invasiveness of social media has undeniably impacted the way people communicate and connect. Higher education has been no exception to the now permanent trend. A recent report from the Pew Research Center (2019) estimated that 79% of 18-29 years olds (traditional age college students) use Facebook and 67% use Instagram. Chan (2017) asserts that “every post on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram paints a picture of what a college is like, who makes up its community, what’s important to the people within it” and the same is true of social media profiles of the departments that make up the college.

At a time when opportunities to participate in digital communication are increasing and the communities we serve are becoming more global, social media is integral to connecting on a very basic level with our students. Further, we recognize that an effective writing center depends on its peer tutors, who serve on the front lines and as the cornerstone of our service, to be necessary participants in our process. By having peer tutors craft social media posts, we are inviting them to contribute to the shared narrative of our writing center and their authentic voices guide our messaging.

We have set two goals for our center in the use and outreach for our social media. First, all of our staff – from our professional to our peer tutors – will become both producers and consumers of our social media. Whereas, in the past, we would ask tutors to participate with us, we have now established the expectation that they will “connect” with us on social media. We have included this expectation in their tutor training, and have made a concentrated effort to involve the whole staff in this process. One of the first activities new tutors

complete during orientation is to find a picture or meme and caption it in a way they think is suitable for our social media (see Figure 1.5). Our student workers are part of the community we seek to engage and therefore, have the best insight into creating meaningful and fun posts. Peer tutor created content includes:

- Images of DSC events, DSC awards, DSC Athletics, and announcements (& go to school events to rep the WC!)
- Daily happenings at the writing center (tutoring, gaming, meetings, etc.)
- Snaps or selfies of our tutors at work (again - keep the word 'appropriate' in mind)
- Gifs/memes/videos with clever "WC" related captions
- Any relevant writing content (quotes, articles, food for thought).

The second goal is to create an environment that celebrates positive interactions in-person and online. This is our overarching social media strategy. We want to highlight our tutor interactions with the student body. We have to acknowledge that “we exist in a pic or it didn’t happen” digital culture, so we have to be intentional about documenting and sharing our outreach. For example, we might highlight our test prep workshops, welcome back events, the Veterans Center, the student athletes, and student organizations at large. This goal helps us to determine the type of posts that occur on our sites because it highlights the positive actions that our students are involved in, and it illustrates the diversity of our tutoring center. We also realize that peer tutors would not always be able to discern what would be appropriate to post on an official college social media site. Creating the goal of posting positive interactions has helped to focus our postings and keep questionable postings at bay.

Google Hangouts

For internal social postings, we have utilized Google Hangouts and it allows us to communicate among each other and between campuses (see Figure 1.6). Postings vary from unexpected wildlife that shows up on our doorstep to discussions of a book someone is reading to a funny meme someone has found where people are meeting up for dinner after work. Again, we focus on positive interactions and many times post photos of when we have managed to get together in face-to-face settings. Though these postings are never prescreened, they are rarely inappropriate. Hangouts also allows us to funnel content into a central location where our designated social media specialist can pull from to re-share relevant, appropriate content on our external profiles.

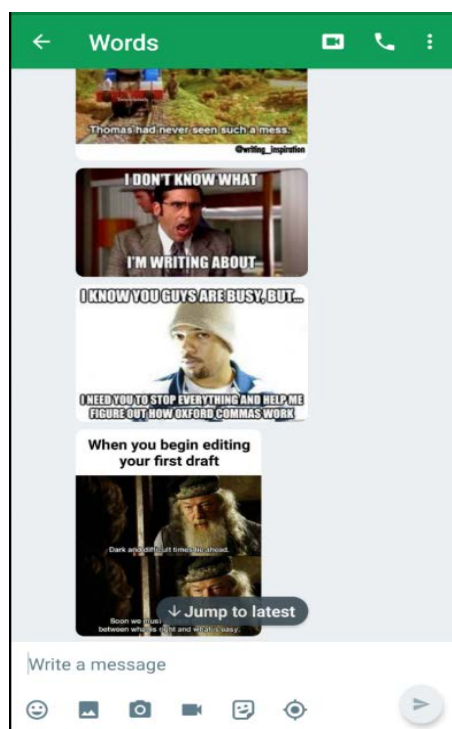


Figure 1.5. Orientation Activity.

In addition to our social media platforms, in spring 2019 the DSC Writing Center introduced a chat widget on our website, which has provided an additional

way to interact synchronously with students seeking quick help, resources, and appointment scheduling. To celebrate this new way of connecting with students online, we share outstanding chat transcripts as part of our staff meeting weekly updates alongside our social media data. Building on the success of the chat and our growing commitment to social media outreach, our next social media goal is to find ways to make our social media interactions more synchronous, specifically through staffing Facebook Messenger.

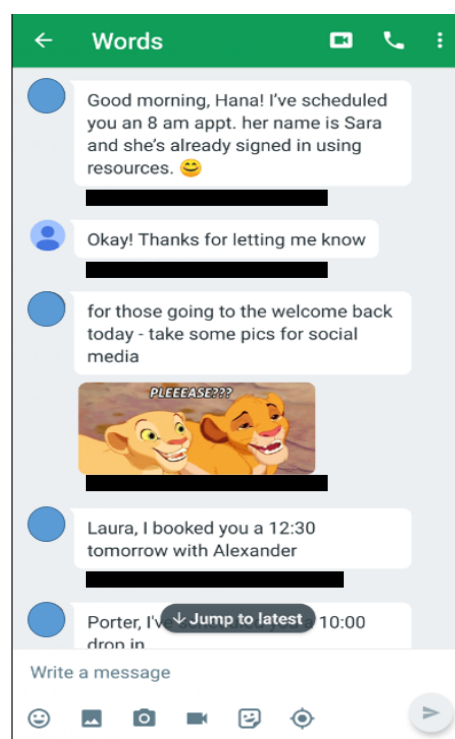


Figure 1.6. Encouraging Tutors to Capture Events and Share.

Conclusion

Having set up what we believe to be workable social media goals, we are continually questioning where to go next and how we can better connect with our student body. For our next campaign, we are going to have students who visit our locations tag us on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook. We are hoping that this will lead

to many positive interactions between our staff and our student body. We also want it to provide another framework for how they view their daily writing that is composed with just their thumbs.

A writing center that aspires to cultivate a community of responsible, informed writers, must practice what it preaches.

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Kristen Bales directs the DSC Writing Center and teaches writing at Daytona State College, where she has worked for seven years. Kristen earned degrees in Integrated Language Arts Education (BA) and English Literature (MA) at Wright State University in Ohio. Currently, Kristen is in a doctoral program at the University of Central Florida studying Educational Leadership in Higher Education. Her research interests include student mentorship, third spaces, and digital makerspaces in writing centers.

Billie Jo Dunaway is the coordinator of the Writing Center and a developmental reading and writing instructor at Daytona State College, where she has worked for more than three years. She received her bachelor's degree in Secondary Education in English from Kent State University in Ohio, and completed her Masters of Education in Reading at the University of Central Florida. Her current research interests involve the evolution of writing centers into communication centers.